



Hi, my name is Jeep Watson and before I inundate you with my so-called “expert” advice, I really should give you some sort of credentials. I have been a musician most of my life – I played my first professional job in 1963 and played full time for about 20 years. In 1973 I was co-founder of Baltimore Bluegrass, Inc., the first (and for many years the only) full service acoustic music store in the Baltimore-Washington area. I also taught bluegrass banjo and guitar for 17 years and during that time had a successful mail order business selling music related learning materials. And finally I’ve performed frequently over the years, both on stage and in the recording studio, as a steel guitarist.

Since 1985, I have been providing professional design and prepress services for the printing industry. I’ve been fortunate to develop my design skills on the computer concurrent with the adoption and growth of the computer in the printing industry. When I started, digital files were a rarity – printers and designers created “camera ready” art with pen and pencil, cameras and film. Color photos were separated by professionals using expensive, sophisticated equipment and the film they produced was then “stripped” into the rest of the layout by other highly skilled professionals. Over the past 15 years the whole industry has turned completely upside down. Now the printing industry runs almost entirely on digital files and those digital files have had a couple of decades to grow in size and complexity. What was once a simple process – type it up, print it out, give it to the printer – is now somewhat more akin to rocket science.

What follows here may sound hauntingly like parental advice but believe me, I learned most of these lessons the hard and expensive way. Take heed...

- 1. PLAN AHEAD** You might spend a year or two recording and mixing your album. Don’t wait til the last night of mixing to start thinking about the artwork for the packaging. I assume you want your album to look as good as it sounds. I can’t tell you how many times someone has come to me and said they are done mastering their album and the release party is next weekend... Rushing at this stage greatly compromises quality and almost ensures errors.
- 2. USE PROFESSIONALS** Printing a four color cover booklet is a complex task. Just because a person has a computer it doesn’t guarantee that they understand colorspace conversions, trapping, registration, proper bleed preparations, proper filetypes and resolutions, dot gain correction curves, unsharp masking, and a myriad of other details. There are dozens of critical variables in your digital files and setting one of them wrong can ruin a thousand dollar print job. Make sure the designer you choose has read **and understands** page 2 of this spec sheet before you start designing.
- 3. PROOF CAREFULLY** Go over your proofs with a fine tooth comb – have a friend do the same. We have no way of knowing if the piano and bass player’s names are switched in the credits or the designer misspelled your mother’s name. Once it’s on the press, it’s too late.

I realize that the specifications on the next page and on the individual product spec sheets are relatively demanding and complex but they really are important if you want professional results. If you or your designer don’t fully understand them or know how to adequately implement them, it is often faster and cheaper to send us your raw artwork and have us develop your concept. Visit our design pages to see samples of our work. If you would like to have us do your design, go to our pricing page to get an idea of the cost and to request our comping package to help you visualize your layout.

GENERAL CD DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS

1. We prefer all final artwork to be assembled in QuarkXpress (v 3.1 or later) for the Mac. PC files are acceptable but are more likely to incur font and graphic compatibility problems. PageMaker (v6.0 or later) is acceptable but slows the process significantly and may incur surcharges. If you use Pagemaker, link – do not embed – all graphics.
2. Drawing programs such as Illustrator, Freehand and Corel Draw are excellent programs for creating lineart, logos and logotypes but are not adequate for creating layouts – in spite of what they tell you in their packaging and advertising. If you absolutely must use one of these other programs, the same rules apply as for Quark documents – see the appropriate Spec Sheet for the component in question as to proper sizing and bleed requirements – and the file must be saved as an EPS file. All of the other requirements below also apply. Preparation surcharges may apply.
3. Photoshop is the highest of the high-end programs for creating, correcting and manipulating photos, collages and all sorts of artwork for placement in a layout program BUT IS TOTALLY INADEQUATE for setting type. If you create final layouts that include a significant amount of small type (12 points or smaller), you will be asked to sign a waiver indicating that you understand that the type in your printed piece will not meet professional quality expectations.
4. Final layouts created in any other programs will be rejected. These include Publisher, Powerpoint, Harvard Graphics, PrintShop and any word processor (including Word and Word Perfect).
5. All graphics used in your layout must be sent with your files. Acceptable graphics formats are TIFF for any halftoned or bitmapped art from paint programs such as Photoshop or Painter and EPS for lineart (vector art) from drawing programs such as Illustrator or Freehand. No other formats are acceptable.
 - > TIFF haltones and photos are generally saved at 300 dpi, though larger files can usually be saved as low as 225 dpi with no loss of quality to keep file sizes down. TIFF lineart should be saved as bitmapped files at no less than 600 dpi. All TIFF files can be saved with LZW Compression to reduce file sizes. Color TIFF files must be saved as CMYK for printing BUT... if you are not comfortable with the conversion from RGB (there can be quite a color shift at this stage if you're not careful), we will convert your files at no charge upon request.
 - > True EPS files from the drawing programs are device independent and will always print at the maximum resolution of the output device (typically 1000-3000 dpi). Note that photos and halftoned art placed in an Illustrator or Freehand layout ARE NOT VECTOR ART and do NOT increase in resolution or quality. Usually it is better to do any complicated masking or layering in Photoshop. All colors must be defined as CMYK or PMS (Pantone) colors – delete all unused colors from the color palette. Save the file as EPS with a Mac preview.
6. All fonts used in your files must be sent to us - both printer fonts AND screen fonts (suitcases). Use postscript fonts. Truetype is unreliable (there are no truetype imaging devices). If you must use truetype fonts, our RIPs usually do a pretty good job of handling them but changes in kerning and tracking are common. If problems occur it will slow down the production of your job and charges may be incurred to fix the file. Send ONLY the fonts you actually use. Don't send whole folders of fonts or suitcases containing more than one font family. Excess fonts can cause system problems and are time-consuming to correct. We maintain most of the Adobe, Bitstream, Image Club and Corel collections – if you call or email to verify whether we have your fonts, you may not have to send them at all.
7. Lineweights should be at least .25 points (.5 pts for reversed lines or builds). Type should be at least 6 points for solid colors – 7 or 8 points for reversed or built type (depending on the weight of the font – bolder is better).
8. Always supply printouts (preferably postscript lasers). Supply one composite folded dummy and one set of separations. That way we know what you are expecting and you know that what you are sending is actually printable.